

7 June 1972

Low-Cost Housing Required Near New Federal Facilities

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New Nixon administration regulations require local officials to guarantee adequate low- and moderate-income housing before government installations can move into their communities.

The regulations, a strong-

est administration statement to date on the subject, could have major implications for the spread of such housing throughout metropolitan Washington.

The regulations specify that the number of low- and moderate-income housing units must be adequate for the employees

of the facility and must be available within six months after a new government installation is opened.

Recent studies by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) have found that if present trends continue, the number of jobs in downtown Washington and nearby Arlington will double from 500,000 to 1,000,000 by 1992. Most of the increase will be federal jobs.

The result, even with the Metro subway system in full operation, would be the total "failure" of Washington's road network during morning and evening rush hours, according to the COG staff.

The solution, according to the COG staff, is a further decentralization of the federal establishment into the suburbs.

In a commentary on the new regulations, published in the Federal Register, the Department of Housing and Urban Development said it would give high priority to a study of the low- and moderate-income housing needs in the Washington area.

In the short run, the General Services Administration, the federal government's property manager, has agreed to move no federal jobs from the city to the suburbs although it will continue to consolidate

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federal operations now in the suburbs.

That GSA policy was announced after strong criticism by a number of local housing and civil rights groups who maintained a number of federal moves to the suburbs, such as the Bureau of Standards relocation to Gaithersburg, had forced low- and moderate-income employees out of their jobs. Inexpensive housing was not available in the suburbs, the groups argued, and public transportation there was inadequate.

In addition to requiring local officials to agree to the construction of low- and moderate-income housing within their jurisdictions, the regulations also require that local authorities agree to end any discrimination in the sale or rental of all housing at any price level.

The regulations require that local officials agree to remove any obstacles within their communities to the construction of low- and moderate-income housing. Those obstacles are not specified.

However, in its published commentary on the regulations, HUD said a handbook that will be prepared will deal with such questions as restrictive zoning ordinances that block the construction of low- and moderate-income housing.

Previously, the Nixon administration has agreed to fight zoning designed to exclude minorities from a community but has refused to intervene against ordinances that prevent the construction of inexpensive housing.

If the affirmative action plans agreed to by local officials are not, in fact, implemented, the regulations state that HUD and GSA will "undertake appropriate action to secure compliance."

Local housing groups had argued that the regulations should contain specific actions to force compliance, such as the withholding of federal funds. However, the regulations contain no specific steps to force compliance.

The local groups, including the Housing Opportunities Council of Metropolitan Washington, had also argued that no federal site should be selected until the needed housing was erected.